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AUTHOR Ray, Robert O.
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ABSTRACT

Although research has identified leisure as a significant factor of individual well-being in different stages of adult life, there is little insight into how leisure behaviors and attitudes are acquired. A cross-sectional sample of 300 rural adults was interviewed. Leisure attitudes were assessed on a leisure ethic scale, and well-being was measured by self-reports of happiness, satisfaction, and health status. Standard demographic and socioeconomic data were also obtained. Subjects were asked to identify their favorite leisure activities, how they learned them, how long they had been doing them, and, if appropriate, why they discontinued any activities. In addition, subjects identified activities they would like to pursue. Results showed that the subjects were happy, satisfied, in good health, and work-oriented. Outdoor pursuits ranked high as favorite activities, followed by reading, crafts, jobs, traveling, cards, and religious activities. Discontinued activities were physical in nature, and had been stopped because of health or age. Traveling was the most cited activity that subjects wished to pursue. The results indicate that early life experience is critical in the formation of leisure behaviors and attitudes, and the family is a major force in shaping early leisure behaviors. (Author/NRB)

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF ADULT LEISURE BEHAVIORS: AN EXPLORATORY INQUIRY

Robert O. Ray
University of Wisconsin - Madison

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF ADULT LEISURE BEHAVIORS:

AN EXPLORATORY INQUIRY

by

Robert O. Ray
Associate Professor
Recreation and Leisure Education
University of Wisconsin - Madison

Introduction

Determining successful aging is a timely topic. Along with such factors of health, income, sex, or marital status, leisure is identified in research as a significant factor of individual well-being in different stages of adult life.

While literature describing the interests and activities of older adults is growing, limited knowledge exists regarding the acquisition of leisure patterns. Leisure, like most other human behavior, is learned (Kelly, 1974; Ray, 1979A). Therefore, it is a lifelong process which unfolds to provide an individual with resources for confronting adulthood and old age.

As a developmental process, leisure behavior must be viewed in light of what came before as well as what might follow. Past activities along with current and desired activities gives a clearer leisure profile of the individual. In addition, factors influencing the choice of leisure patterns need be examined: how one learns an activity, with whom one usually participates, length of participation, and meaning of that activity all are part of the leisure lifestyle of a person. Just as important to understanding leisure are the reasons why some activities are terminated and others desired but not currently pursued. (barriers)

This study was an attempt to describe leisure as a lifelong, developmental phenomenon. It noted what adults have most enjoyed doing and their attitudes toward leisure. It also provides insight into how those behaviors and attitudes

were developed. In addition, it suggests how conditions might be changed to enhance leisure lifestyles.

Literature Review

There is growing recognition that activity for the sake of being active is insufficient to define well-being and successful adaptation to the aging process. In a study of life-satisfaction and activities among older adults, Ray (1979B) concluded that neither the number of activities one pursued nor the frequency of participation was significantly related to life-satisfaction. Similar results have been obtained by others. In a study of adults aged 45 and older McGuire noted that life-satisfaction was more closely tied to leisure when activity was viewed in terms of choice and control rather than frequency and number.

In other attempts researchers have taken a developmental approach to leisure. Yoesting and Burkhead (1973) studied the impact of childhood activity level on adult behavior, and found that leisure socialization as a child influenced adult activity patterns. In a later study, Kelly (1974) concluded that the development of leisure behavior was a continuous process from childhood through adulthood.

The development of leisure attitudes and behavior is influenced by a variety of factors and settings. Previous studies have shown relationships between socioeconomic status and leisure (Havighurst, 1957; Hendee, 1969; Andrews et al., 1973) as well as residence patterns and leisure (Schnore, 1966; Murray, 1974). Barnhard (1973) illustrated how the use of educational programs can promote quality recreational experiences at early, formative ages, and Enosh (1976) highlighted the effects peers and cohorts have on outdoor recreation activities. The family has also been singled out as influential in shaping leisure behavior (Colton, 1976; Carlson, 1979).

Methodology

Subjects were chosen by random digit dialing, a cross sectional sample of 300 adults from rural areas of Wisconsin was interviewed in 1981.

To minimize sexual and occupational biases, a screening procedure was used to insure that men and women were given an equal chance of responding. Calls were made throughout the day, evening, and weekend, with appointments arranged for those who might otherwise be unavailable for an interview.

Interviews averaged 15 to 20 minutes, and an overall response rate of 75% was achieved. The interview schedule had 4 main sections: demographic and socioeconomic data, leisure attitudes or orientations, well-being measures, and leisure activity patterns.

Leisure attitudes were assessed through the use of a leisure ethic scale developed by Crandal and Slivken (1980). Well-being measures were a self-report of happiness, satisfaction, and health status based on Cantil's Self-anchoring Ladder Scale (1965).

The largest portion of the questionnaire involved leisure activity. Subjects were asked for their favorite activities, how long they had been doing them, how they learned them, with whom they usually performed them, and, if appropriate, why they were discontinued. In addition, subjects identified activities they would like to pursue and why they were not able to do so now.

Standard demographic and socioeconomic data was obtained. This included age, sex, occupation, education, income, marital status, and residence patterns.

Results

This study had more women (61%) than men (39%), and nearly three-quarters of the subjects (70%) were married (Table 1). Average age was 47, but there was a relatively even distribution of people across all ages (Table 1). Over

three-quarters (78%) of the subjects had finished high school, and close to one-fifth (18%) had one college degree or more. The median income was between $10,000 and $14,999. The largest percentage of respondents were homemakers (25%), followed by professionals/administrators/entrapreneurs (19%) and retirees (18%). Farmers made up 7% of the sample and 1% were students or unemployed. Almost half (49%) were living in a small town while the remainder were divided between farm and rural nonfarm residences (Table 2).

Questions relating to work and leisure revealed this population was work-oriented. Nearly three-quarters (71%) felt that their work was more important to them than other activities, and only 10% did not prefer one or the other. When asked if they would work if they did not have to, 73% said they would. In answering other questions related to leisure, respondents were slightly more favorable to leisure than not. Almost all said they admired a person who can relax, while a great majority (85%) would not want to lead a life of complete leisure (Table 3).

Well-being responses indicated the sample was happy, satisfied, and in good health. Overall, subjects averaged 7.8 out of 10 on well-being measures.

When asked their favorite activity, outdoor pursuits ranked high. Also popular were reading, crafts, their present job, traveling, cards, and religious activities (Table 4). Although most of these activities had been pursued for 10 or more years, about a quarter of them had been initiated within the past 5 years. Half (46.7%) of the activities were learned from family members, and another quarter of them were self-initiated. In terms of actual participation, the family ranked first and was closely followed by self and friends. Activities were personally significant when they involved achievements, were connected with nature or solitude, were relaxing, or were a means of socializing.

Discontinued activities were primarily those physical in nature, such as dancing, swimming and team sports. The most common reason given for dropping these activities was health or advancing age. Other frequently mentioned reasons were loss of interest, no time, no companion, or a lack of facilities.

Traveling was the most cited activity subjects wanted to pursue in the future. This was followed by continuing education and employment or a change in jobs. The most common reasons given for not being able to participate in desired future activities were a lack of money, other duties or responsiblities, inadequate time, and no facilities.

Conclusions and Implications

Results of this study highlight a number of considerations for social services. Basically, leisure is a lifelong, developmental process "worked out in the context of family, school, work, and community institutions" (Kleiber and Kelly, 1980:127). As this study showed, adults pursue new activities and experiences throughout life, whether it be recreational, educational, or occupational in nature. At the same time, leisure appears compatible with patterns (not necessarily specific activities) learned early in life.

The developmental approach demands sensitivity to previous life experiences. As this study showed, the family in particular stands out as a major force in shaping early leisure behaviors. Kleiber and Kelly (1980) indicate parental values and preferences translate into child rearing practices which predispose children toward certain leisure experiences. Family influences do not end with childhood, for adults of all ages find leisure within a family context satisfying

Opportunities need to exist for those who are 1) less capable of physical

exertion, 2) are without companions, or 3) live on a limited income. In rural areas in particular, the lack of adequate facilities and opportunity is a problem.

The influence of early life experiences on adult preferences and patterns illustrates the importance of leisure education for families and individuals. Helping young individuals and families develop satisfying leisure experiences through continued learning could facilitate successful aging.

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TABLE 1

SEX, AGE, AND MARITAL STATUS

DEMOGRAPHICS	N	%
SEX		
MALE		(39.0)
FEMALE		(61.0)
MARITAL STATUS		
SINGLE	33	(11.0)
MARRIED	212	(70.0)
DIVORCED	16	(5.3)
WIDOWED	39	(13.0)
AGE*		
18-24	34	(11.3)
25-29	32	(10.7)
30-34	32	(10.7)
35-39	22	(7.3)
40-44	24	(8.0)
45-49	22	(7.3)
50-54	19	(6.3)
55-59	20	(6.7)
60-64	24	(8.0)
65-69	21	(7.0)
70-74	25	(8.3)
75 +	20	(6.7)

* MEAN = 47 MEDIAN = 45 RANGE = 18-91

TABLE 2

RESIDENCE PATTERNS

Locale	Time Period					
	Childhood		Adulthood		Current*	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Rural Farm	71	(23.7)	86	(28.7)	140	(46.7)
Rural Nonfarm	82	(27.3)	44	(14.7)	27	(9.0)
Small Town < 2,500	147	(49.0)	100	(33.3)	71	(23.7)
City 2,500-10,000	16	(5.3)	23	(7.7)		
City 10,000-50,000	12	(4.0)	11	(3.7)		
City > 50,000	41	(13.7)	28	(9.3)		

*This study was restricted to those currently residing in rural areas.

TABLE 3

MEAN SCORES FOR LEISURE ETHIC SCALE

LEISURE ETHIC STATEMENT	MEAN SCORE*
MY LEISURE IS MY MOST ENJOYABLE TIME	4.2
I ADMIRE A PERSON WHO KNOWS HOW TO RELAX	5.1
I LIKE TO DO THINGS ON THE SPUR OF THE MOMENT	4.3
I WOULD LIKE TO LEAD A LIFE OF COMPLETE LEISURE	2.1
MOST PEOPLE SPEND TOO MUCH TIME ENJOYING THEMSELVES TODAY	3.6
I DON'T FEEL GUILTY ABOUT ENJOYING MYSELF	5.1
PEOPLE SHOULD SEEK AS MUCH LEISURE AS POSSIBLE IN THEIR LIVES	3.7
I'D LIKE TO HAVE AT LEAST TWO MONTHS VACATION A YEAR	3.3
LEISURE IS GREAT	4.6
IT'S GOOD FOR ADULTS TO BE PLAYFUL	4.1
OVERALL	4.1

*BASED ON A SCALE FROM 1-6, WITH 1 THE LOWEST POSSIBLE SCORE AND 6 THE HIGHEST

TABLE 4

FAVORITE ACTIVITIES

Past	Present	Future
Dancing	Fishing	Traveling
Swimming	Gardening	Continuing Education
Traveling	Reading	Work/Job
Fishing	Hunting/trapping	Golf
Work/Job	Sewing	Flying
Horseback Riding	Work/Job	Fishing
Hunting/Trapping	Traveling	Dancing
Reading	Camping	Family
Bowling	Cards	Farm Activities
Baseball/ Softball	Religion	Camping